

# Holier Than I now

*"I am not an apologist for this or any other administration."*

By Wayne Barrett

Archbishop John J. O'Connor has made God a registered Republican. O'Connor registered as a Republican himself in October 1980, just a month before Ronald Reagan's first election, using his sister's home in Pennsylvania as his address. Checks with half a dozen election boards in the cities where O'Connor has lived and a protracted stirring of O'Connor's vague memory suggest that the archbishop has, to the degree that he's been registered at all, stuck with God's Own Party since 1946. Two weeks after he caused such a fuss over Democratic vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro's abortion position, he registered in New York for the first time and changed his party affiliation to independent.

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## On the Campaign Trail

The focus on the Ferraro flap has obscured O'Connor's broader role in the national politics of 1984. In light of new facts, that chronology merits a detailed retelling:

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● O'Connor's mid-October timing could not have been better for the Republicans. A month earlier the archbishop had scheduled an October 15 major address in New York, responding to Governor Cuomo's Notre Dame speech and entitled, "Human Lives, Human Rights." He could not then have anticipated that Walter Mondale would at that same time decline his invitation to the annual Al Smith dinner and ask that Ferraro substitute for him. In view of what O'Connor had already said about Ferraro, it was no surprise that the archdiocese's dinner committee declined to let her speak. The two stories broke the same day: O'Connor made his strongest antiabortion pitch ever (87 references to abortion and 32 to the unborn in a 30-page speech) and the committee nixed Ferraro. Even the *Post's* headline juxtaposition of the two events was justifiable.

Four days later Reagan dominated a dinner that honors a Democratic governor but has become a rich Republican event. Sitting between Nancy and Ronald Reagan was industrialist J. Peter Grace, the archdiocese's leading Catholic layman, who is now spending millions on the baby-pays-for-the-deficit television ads to publicize his own fanatical, budget-bombing conservatism. A matter of some recent controversy because of his corporate ties to a Nazi war criminal and his much publicized description of food stamps as "basically a Puerto Rican program," Grace has long been associated with CIA-linked enterprises like Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe, and the agency's Latin American conduit, American Institute for Free Labor Development. Grace now chairs a commission—the President's Private Sector Survey on Cost Controls—that has undertaken what Reagan calls "the largest effort of its kind ever mounted to save tax dollars."

Next to the archbishop was Clare Booth Luce, the matriarch of the Catholic right wing in America, a former ambassador to Italy and a current member of the president's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, which oversees covert operations. Grace and Luce were members of a board chaired by O'Connor since 1982—the Pope John Paul II Center of Prayer and Study for Peace. In addition to such prominent local Democrats as the governor and the mayor, O'Connor's head table also included current CIA director William Casey and former treasury secretary William Simon, one of the leading forces in the current Catholic laymen's attack on the national bishops' progressive pastoral letter on the economy.

"It's clearly a biased dinner," said Democratic historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. "When Cardinal Cooke was there it was a very nonpartisan thing. But Admiral O'Connor is clearly a Reaganite and he's trying to transform a fairly nonpartisan event into a Reagan rally." In fact, the dinner had become increasingly Republican prior to O'Connor's arrival—GOP gubernatorial candidate Lew Lehrman got top billing at the 1982 dinner—but the Ferraro rejection was the culmi-

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nation of a campaign season of archdiocesan anti-Democratic abuse. The paradox was that a dinner memorializing the first Catholic presidential candidate may have marked the last time, at least for the immediate future, that this prochoice party can afford to carry a Catholic target on its national ticket.

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## O'Connor's Commander in Chief

In the final days of the presidential campaign, a controversy arose over the Reagan campaign attempt to get Catholic newspapers across the country to print an ad picturing the president and Pope John Paul II shaking hands. At least 10 Catholic papers, including *Catholic New York*, the archdiocese's newspaper, refused. The National Catholic News Service called Archbishop John Foley, who runs the Vatican office for social communications. Foley used to work for John Cardinal Krol, editing his diocesan newspaper. Foley did not mince words. He said it was "not surprising" that the Reagan campaign was using the picture because the president has been "closely associated" with Catholics. But Foley did not even stop there.

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Also unnoticed was the coincidence of the three events that dominated Catholic news at the start of the year. On January 10 the White House formally announced that it would seek full diplomatic relations with the Vatican, a papal goal for decades. A little more than a week later, Bernard Law was named the archbishop of Boston. By the end of the month, John O'Connor was selected for New York (and Timlin followed him in Scranton). All three would hit the campaign trail for the president. The man elevated to papal legate as a result of the new diplomatic relations between America and the Vatican, the pope's representative here, Archbishop Pio Laghi, got himself embroiled in a small controversy a few months later when he took a \$16,000 plane ride on the president, who'd summoned him in August from Washington for a West Coast meeting. Laghi took a 14-passenger C-20 gratis to the Virgin Islands after his visit with the president. While these events are cited not to suggest any crass quid pro quo, they do cumulatively say something about the relationship of the pope and the president.

As does a version of their relationship presented in a recent book by Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts, a team that has written nine books with global sales of 36 million copies. Their previous book on John Paul, called *Pontiff*, was a best-seller in 19 countries. But their second book has gotten them in trouble. The American version of *Averting Armageddon* is 140 pages shorter than the British edition. One writer told the *Intelligencer* column in *New York* magazine recently that "pressures were brought to bear on the publisher by the State Department and the CIA." Doubleday denies it. In any event, the British version of the book paints a picture of a pope whose world view both coincides with and is shaped by the Reagan administration.

The book reaches back to the days of John XXIII, who distanced the papacy from its prior straightline of anti-Communist American support and was therefore the victim of six CIA bugs planted in the Vatican. The authors say that John Paul brought the agency back "in full papal favour" and made it "the main source of secular intelligence." He gets frequent CIA briefings. CIA detectors, geared to warn against any terrorist attack on the Vatican from the air, have been installed on the roof of the papal apartment. All the pope talks about at dinner is the Soviet threat. Security agents provided by the CIA supposedly accompanied the pope to Nicaragua, where he took on the Sandinistas. The CIA, through the American embassy in Warsaw, kept John Paul informed of Soviet reaction during his historic visit to Poland.

In interviews that the authors taped with Reagan's emissary to the Vatican, William Wilson, the ambassador points to El Salvador, Asia, all "the trouble spots" in the world, and says the pope has a hand in all of them. Where does

Wilson detect differences between the pope and the U.S.? "No conflict at all," says Wilson. Any misunderstandings? "None at all. We talk a lot to them. They listen very carefully." Wilson admits, for example, that he and the Reagan administration used "every avenue open to get the pope to make the American bishops realize what they were doing" on the nuclear pastoral—namely, "leaving our country naked."

Wilson said he also pressured Bernardin: "I exposed Bernardin to this administration's point of view. There is nothing wrong with that." Right after Bernardin met with the pope in January 1983, while the committee was reviewing its second draft, the pope met with Vice-President George Bush. According to Thomas and

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Witts, Bush took with him "the pope's personal view of the pastoral letter plus an impression which allowed the vice-president to conclude that on all the important points in the administration's disarmament policy," the pope and the president are "in accord."

The views that O'Connor began to press on the committee in early 1983 were similar to the concerns of the Vatican and the European bishops. Any no-first-use language was regarded as a threat to NATO since U.S. policy has long contemplated the use of nuclear weapons to respond to a conventional Soviet attack on Europe. Thomas and Witts claim to have seen detailed folders maintained in the Vatican secretariat on O'Connor's views and background, as well as the other members of the nuclear committee. According to Castelli's book, the committee, and especially Bernardin, were irked when they learned that O'Connor had discussed the letter privately with the pope. O'Connor may have gone further than the pope would have, but his efforts to dilute the letter probably flowed from his best sense of what his own commander-in-chief wanted. Similarly, he is closer to the pope's staunchly anti-Communist line in Central America than the U.S. bishops. Both have wrapped themselves around Obando y Bravo.

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